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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the ideas presented at a parent-child relationship forum for Midwest business and industrial leaders, an offshoot of the 1970 White House Conference on Children. Included is an overview of some of the problems of youth in America, a look at some of the research relating to adults' interacting with children, and a discussion of the expanding influence of industry on family life. A list of twelve recommendations is given for businesses and industries to use in improving parent-child relationships. (SET)

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Wingspread Conference on the Report of Forum 15

1970 White House Conference on Children

WINGSPREAD REPORT

CHILDREN AND SOCIETY

a conference for business and industrial leaders

convened by

The Johnson Foundation

in cooperation with

The New York State College of Human Ecology and
The School of Business and Public Administration
at Cornell University

and

The Russell Sage Foundation

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"What is needed is a change in our patterns of living which will once again bring people back into the lives of children and children back into the lives of people." *

"More than any other institution in our society, it is American business and industry that can determine the fate of the American family and the American child. More than any other institution, they have the power to reverse the present trend toward alienation and to place families and children at the center rather than the periphery of our national life." *

* Report to the President: White House Conference on Children (1970), page 253

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
TO
THE WINGSPREAD CONFERENCE ON THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP
May 12, 1971

Upon gathering in Washington last December, the delegates to the White House Conference on Children were presented with a challenge and a mandate by the distinguished group of citizens who were to act as the chairmen of the Conference's 26 Forums. Written in the form of a preamble and delivered at the opening session, the chairmen stated.

"Our children and our families are in deep trouble. A society that neglects its children and fears its youth cannot care about its future. Surely this is the way to national disaster.

Our society has the capacity to care and the resources to act. Act we must.

"There is a need to change our patterns of living so that once again we will bring adults back into the lives of children and children back into the lives of adults.

The changes must come at all levels of society -- in business, industry, mass media, schools, government, communities, neighborhoods, and, above all, in ourselves. The changes must come now.

The delegates responded with a series of recommendations, some very general and some quite specific, some utopian and others highly practical, some directed at the short-term and others reaching ahead to the 21st Century. But all worthy of serious consideration by those individuals and institutions to which they were directed.

It is for this reason that it is a great pleasure for me to send my good wishes through Stephen Hess to the participants to this Wingspread Conference on the Parent-Child Relationship, as well as my appreciation to the Conference's conveners: The Johnson Foundation, Cornell University, and the Russell Sage Foundation.

Never before in the six decade history of the White House Conference on Children has there been as much involvement on the part of business and industry leaders. An active Business-Industry Council, chaired by Mr. Augustine Harusi, was of considerable assistance to the White House during the planning stages of the Conference and many businessmen attended the Conference as delegates and observers.

All of this, of course, reflects the expanding role of business and the businessman in our society. As business leaders you are increasingly aware that your products, plants and advertising affect the qualities of life, not just the qualities of the Nation's goods and service. And so, too, it is good to pause at this Conference to reflect on the recommendations of Dr. Bronfenbrenner and his White House Conference colleagues--namely, that you are also the employers of parents.

I wish you much success in your deliberations.



Participants in the Wingspread Conference (from left to right) Leslie Paffrath, President, The Johnson Foundation; Stephen Hess, National Chairman, White House Conference on Children and Youth; David Goslin, Russell Sage Foundation; Urie Bronfenbrenner, Cornell University.

Meeting at Wingspread, The Johnson Foundation conference center in Racine, Wisconsin in May of 1971, more than sixty business and industrial leaders from the Midwest were challenged by the following statement:

*"...The failure to reorder our priorities, the insistence on business as usual, and the continued reliance on rhetoric as a substitute for fundamental reforms can only have one result: the far more rapid and pervasive growth of alienation, apathy, drugs, delinquency, and violence among the young and not so young in all segments of our national life. We face the prospect of a society which resents its own children and fears its youth. Surely this is a road to national destruction."**

This statement is an excerpt from a report to the President of the United States presented at the White House Conference on Children in December 1970.

On the premise that the future of any society lies in its children, successive presidents of the United States in this century have regularly held White House Conferences on the nation's youth. The purpose of these conferences is to determine trends, define problems, and, ultimately, to seek solutions to the problems. The latest of these, the White House Conference on Children held in December, 1970, brought to light current sociological crises.

At the Wingspread meeting, which was attended by Stephen Hess, National Chairman of the White House Conference

* Report to the President: White House Conference on Children (1970), page 242 (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. \$4.75)

on Children, Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, Chairman of Forum 15 of the White House Conference, explained that the problem centers on national neglect of our children and their parents.

*"We are isolating children from the world of adults, placing them in a world ruled by the destructive impulses and compelling pressures both of the age-segregated peer group and the aggressive and exploitive television screen. What is needed is a change in our patterns of living which will once again bring people back into the lives of children and children back into the lives of people."**

These findings were presented as a challenge to the business and industrial leaders at the Wingspread Conference.

While Forum 15 of the White House Conference on Children considers numerous segments of society to be influential in the development of youth, the business and industrial community is perhaps the most important. According to Professor Bronfenbrenner,

*"More than any other institution in our society, it is American business and industry that can determine the fate of the American family and the American child. More than any other institution, they have the power to reverse the present trend toward alienation and to place families and children at the center rather than the periphery of our national life."**

Here, in the open forum setting of Wingspread, an idea born at the 1970 White House Conference on Children was first translated into social action. Here the thesis

* Report to the President: White House Conference on Children (1970), page 253

of altering human patterns and values through direct business and industry cooperation was put to test. The hard and often disturbing facts of the attitudes of American youth were presented. The challenge to alter the course of social development of the nation's youth and the future of the nation was issued. This is what they heard. This was their response.

A LOOK AT ROOT CAUSES

According to studies* the number of drug abuse arrests involving children ages 12 to 18 doubled between 1964 and 1968. Since 1963 delinquency has increased at a faster rate than the juvenile population. One out of nine children in the United States will appear in juvenile court before age 18, if this rate of increase holds.

About half these crimes involve breaking and entering, vandalism, theft, and so-called meaningless crimes of destruction -- often directed against objects intended for the specific use of these same children. Nor are these crimes limited to the slum areas of our nation: data indicate a general trend across all classes and environments.

These figures are based on cases that were detected and prosecuted. Many more are neither detected nor prosecuted. Hence, the situation is worse than the data indicate.

*Profiles of Children, White House Conference on Children, 1970, pages 78, 79, 108, 179, 180

According to Professor Bronfenbrenner, we are witnessing the results of a social pattern that threatens society. We are seeing the effects of national alienation of our youth and its manifestations in withdrawal, resentment -- a lashing out at society, which to them has become the enemy. Typically, the alienated person feels dehumanized and responds in a predictably inhuman manner.

It was suggested by some in the Wingspread group that parents no longer care as much about their children as they once did. Professor Bronfenbrenner disagreed, commenting that parents today are probably more concerned and worried about their children than ever before, but society, its structure, values, and direction simply do not allow families, and parents in particular, to function. Urbanization, suburbanization, community activities, business, industry -- all contribute to increasing the gap between the adult world and youth.

CHILDREN NEED PEOPLE

The basic thesis of the Report of Forum 15 of the 1970 White House Conference on Children is that children need people in order to become human. This is firmly grounded both in scientific research and in human experience. It is primarily through observing, playing and working with others -- both younger and older than himself -- that the child discovers what he can presently do, his potential, and how to develop his skills and identity. It

is primarily through exposure and interaction with adults and children of different ages that the child acquires new interests and skills, and learns the meaning of tolerance, cooperation and compassion. The Report further contends that parents are best equipped to fulfill this function, and that exposure to other adults is a necessary secondary requirement or alternative.

Two kinds of data were presented at the Wingspread Conference to illustrate this thesis. The first investigated various methods of working with children. It was found that results were best if the children were taught by two adults, with one acting as a reinforcer (praising and admonishing) and the other acting as a model for the child. Then it was noted that it was best if the two adults were of opposite sexes, with the reinforcer of the opposite sex as the child, and the model of the same sex. It was even more effective when the reinforcer worked with and admonished the child and the model. Where, other than in the family context, is there a better example of this situation?

The second case is an even more dramatic example of the effect of adult interaction on child development. Conducted some 30 years ago by Harold Skeels, this work is now being recognized for its merit. Skeels used a control group of 26 mentally retarded children, considered unadoptable and uneducable. Half the children were placed in the usual institution provided for such children. The other 13 were

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placed, one to a ward, in what was then called a home for feeble-minded women. The latter children were under the care of the women in the wards. The women soon took to the children, showering them with affection and care. Generally one woman assumed the role of mother, and the other women took secondary roles as interested, participating adults. After one and a half years the entire group of children was re-tested. The startling result was that the children under the care of feeble-minded women showed an average increase in IQ of 28 points, while the children left in the institution dropped about an equal amount.

Thirty years later the children raised in the home for feeble-minded women were all either self-supporting or married to someone what was self-supporting. All but two had graduated from high school, and four had gone on to universities. In fact, one of these received a masters degree in psychology. Of the other half, those raised in the institution for mentally retarded children, all were either still in the institution, or deceased.

According to Professor Bronfenbrenner, these studies point to a fundamental principle:

"The extent to which children receive the kind of care and attention which is necessary for development depends on the extent to which those who have responsibility for their care are provided with a time, a place, and the encouragement for activities with children and young people."

A host of factors conspire to isolate children from the rest of society: the fragmentation of the extended family; the separation of residential and business areas;

the disappearance of the neighborhood; zoning ordinances; occupational mobility; child labor laws; consolidated schools; television; separate patterns of social life for different age groups; the working mother; delegation of child care to specialists; increased emphasis on parent participation in civic, community, social and church work; business trips; weekend work.

One of the more insidious dangers is the absent parent. (The term absent should not be confused with the missing parent as a result of death or divorce. Studies indicate that in the latter case, provision is often made to compensate for the missing parent.) Simply stated, a parent who is elsewhere, no matter how worthwhile the cause, cannot be with his or her children. This is not to say that a parent who is at home necessarily interacts with his children, but if he is absent he certainly cannot interact with them.

As the void left by the frequently-absent parent grows, the vacuum is often filled by the age-segregated peer group. The child turns to others of his age simply because he has no one else with whom to socialize. Studies show that once the values and attitudes of the peer group are known, the attitudes of parents are virtually of no concern or effect.

The argument was raised by one of the Wingspread Conference participants that since the peer group was so

powerful perhaps we were wasting time attempting to work with the parent. Professor Bronfenbrenner pointed out that the same studies indicate children do not necessarily desire it to be this way. Those children who spend much of their time in peer groups report that their parents are both less affectionate and less firm in discipline. Their attachment to the peer group appears to be based more on lack of attention and concern at home than on any positive attraction by the peer group itself. In fact, these children have a rather negative view of their friends and of themselves. They are pessimistic about the future, rate low in leadership qualities, and are prone to negative actions.

Several persons in the Wingspread group disagreed and were of the opinion that children in the Midwest, especially the northern Midwest region, simply did not have such problems. Others quickly brought out the fact that what has been happening on the University of Wisconsin Madison campus is really not different from what has been happening on campuses across the nation. One of the Wingspread Conference participants suggested that "maybe we just don't know our children anymore."

Professor Bronfenbrenner pointed out that about a quarter of a century ago, about the period of World War II, child development and technological advancements brought about a situation that progressively excluded children from the lives of adults and adults from the lives of children. Even the supermarket, with its sterile shelves and impersonal



Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell University, Chairman of Forum 15 of the White House Conference on Children, addressing the Wingspread Conference.

checkout systems contributed to this. Buying a loaf of bread, once the chore of the child, has been replaced by an automobile trip out of the neighborhood. It is possible to buy a week's groceries without significant human interaction.

Small shops and restaurants, where children used to be welcome, are now out of bounds. Owners simply feel they cannot have children loitering on the premises. These places once offered a medium for real interaction between people. Even modern residential planning seems to lead to isolation of the children. A study conducted in West Germany of children living in an ultra-modern development, where much thought and expense were put into planning a playground safe from dangers, showed that the children were soon bored with this sterile, fenced-in area.

The consensus of the experts preparing the White House Conference Report was that society still has the capacity and the values necessary to reverse this trend. But society will need to change its living patterns to "...bring people back into the lives of children and children back into the lives of people."

INDUSTRY IS CHALLENGED

Although there are many contributing factors, and many avenues to explore in the solution, it is important that we bring our most potent social forces to bear on the problem. Business and industry have the organization, energy, and resources to meet this difficult challenge.

Where do we begin?

As a start, the following specific recommendations (drawn from The Report of Forum 15, 1970 White House Conference on Children) were offered to the Wingspread Conference for consideration. Participants differed on the relative merits and practicability of the various proposals. But they were regarded as a starting point for those leaders interested in the challenge.

1. Every industry, business, and branch of the government should institute a Commission for Children and Families to examine the impact of organization policies and practices on the lives of families. The Commission should make concrete recommendations, and implement changes in existing policies and practices designed to strengthen the integrity of the family.

2. Business firms and their departments should consider "adopting" groups of children. For example, a department could adopt a school classroom, day care group, Head Start program, or scout troop. Employees would invite the children to visit them at work so that children would learn not only about specific jobs, but also about the people who do them. In return, the employees would come to know the children on a different basis by taking an active interest in the day-to-day activities of their "adopted" children. Business and industrial firms should experiment with new ways of establishing close and continuing relationships with children on a community basis.

3. Firms should establish flexible work schedules so that both male and female employees can be with children when they are most needed, as when children get home from school or when they are sick.

4. The organization that keeps the parent away contributes to undermining the welfare of his children. A family-oriented personnel policy which reduces obligations which take the parent from the home would not only counteract these effects but -- if offered as a fringe benefit -- would help attract and hold able personnel. The most capable and responsible staff are likely to be those who care most about their families.

5. Many social and recreational activities sponsored or expected by business organizations have the effect of separating parents from their children, by taking the parents out of the home precisely at the time when children are there. An emphasis on family-oriented programs in which persons of all ages could participate would help to reinforce, rather than undermine, active concern of parents and society at large for children and youth.

6. The policy of some organizations transferring personnel every few years from one city or region to another is highly disruptive to family life. The impact is hardest on children, since healthy psychological development requires a degree of stability and continuity in the social environment from childhood through adolescence. A pattern of life which repeatedly tears the child

away from familiar friends, schools and neighborhoods increases the likelihood of the child's alienation both inside and outside the family. Accordingly, moves should be kept to a minimum.

7. Firms should increase the number and status of part-time positions so that employees who wish to give a larger part of their time and energy to parenthood or other activities with children can do so without sacrificing their career opportunities and rate of income. Employers and employees should be creative in developing home-based, part-time employment opportunities.

8. In view of the cost to society of welfare and institutional care of children with congenital problems, organizations have an obligation to develop policies of leave and rest for mothers during pregnancy and early months of infant care. These needs should be met without jeopardizing their employment.

9. Day care facilities should be established within or near the place of work, but with independent administrative arrangements which allow parents a determining voice in the planning and execution of the program. Parents and other employees should be encouraged to visit the day care facility during lunch hours or coffee breaks to participate in activities with the children.

10. Firms should develop plans and procedures for providing supervised apprenticeship opportunities for children and youth, not just for specific vocational training but as a means of introducing them to activities in the world of adults.

11. A strong position on the values and priorities which are communicated in advertising and public relations programs is recommended. Above all, children and families should not be exploited for commercial purposes. Business and industrial organizations should take an active role in the sponsorship of public service advertising designed to enhance the status of families and importance of children in American life.

12. Plans for plant location, community development and industrial complexes should give explicit consideration to factors which influence the course of family life. Specifically referred to are those which can provide opportunity for active participation of parents and other adults in the life of the children.

AN EXPERIMENT IN LIVING

One of the more thought-provoking and compelling of these recommendations is the idea of adopting groups of children, not in the customary sense of inviting children in for a tour, or sending a public relations person to the school, but of bringing children into the work setting on a continuing basis.

Nor is this to be a mere baby-sitting chore in which the child obediently sits and watches the adult at work. Instead it would place children and adults side by side in a real-life situation where the child takes an active part in "doing", if not operating the machine, at least being next to it, asking questions, and learning that real people operate machines. In the world where adults spend much of their life's energy, children can interact and perhaps gain insight into the causes of adult behavior, for example, why fatigue influences adult behavior after work at home. Obviously, the adults themselves would know the children in a different setting.

Immediate reaction to the idea from many of the businessmen at the Wingspread meeting was "impossible." A tour, a brief visit, yes. But to bring children into the office or shop while trying to get work done - no. "Children are a nuisance." "We won't be able to get our work

Jone." "It's too dangerous here. "Children would get bored in our office." "The business of business is business." "If someone has a personal family problem, that's his business -- not ours."

David Goslin, Staff Sociologist at the Russell Sage Foundation, and Professor Bronfenbrenner conceived a program in which "adopting" could be tried. The Detroit Free Press agreed to try the experiment. The Free Press invited a group of sixteen 11 and 12 year old children from two public elementary schools to spend three days in their plant working with them, and becoming friends.

According to David Goslin, initial adult reaction was guarded and stiff. But by the end of the third day, the children had had an effect on the employees and some deep-rooted friendships were being made. One of the workmen commented, "It's hard to believe but in three short days I think I know this kid better than my own children." This comment may be the essence of the argument. We cannot understand what we do not in fact relate with, and this is best done through experience. This experiment did more than help the group of sixteen children. It caused the adults in the experiment to take a new look at their home situations.



A PLACE TO MEET, A WAY TO UNDERSTAND
Children working with the staff of the Detroit Free Press

A SEARCH FOR IDEAS

After viewing a film, A PLACE TO MEET, A WAY TO UNDERSTAND, documenting the Detroit Free Press experiment, participants in the Wingspread Conference formed discussion groups to translate recommendations into workable ideas. A good deal of self searching took place. Not all favored the recommendations of The White House Conference Report. Nor did everyone agree on the basic premise that business and industry could or should help. But there was a consensus that much could be done by industry and business, through leadership.

One particularly provocative discussion centered on the fundamental problem of job devotion, to the exclusion of a healthy family relationship. Some felt it was an individual choice for the worker. He alone should decide whether to seek promotion by devoting considerable "off duty" time to his job and accepting transfers. His alternate choice, some thought, might be to settle for less material compensation on the job, but reap the benefits of a closer family life.

The group pondered the question - "Is there no other way to show dedication to work than by excessive time and energy? Must we force the individual to decide between family and job?"

Several businessmen suggested that the children of their own employees be invited to participate in an experiment similar to the one in Detroit. This would allow a "trial balloon" on a controlled group, while promoting family re-

lationshps for employees. Others suggested working through established organizations such as Junior Achievement, thus strengthening an existing structure. Still others cautioned against attempting too much without sound preliminary work. "Let's not go off half cocked - let's do some thinking before putting too much into it."

One firm described a program it had developed which was basically in accord with these recommendations. The firm hired mothers during the school year, and college students to take the place of the mothers during the summer season when the mothers preferred being home with the younger children. Obviously, the employees had to agree to the plan before accepting employment; but the plan had worked for some time. Others pointed out that certain regulatory statutes would need to be amended to expand this practice. Significantly, many agreed that our work-oriented society has changed considerably over the years, and that it was difficult for the child to acquire an understanding of the occupational world. In the past, society was agrarian, small business and shop oriented. Children lived and played while their fathers worked in the field or craft shop. As one businessman stated, "It's easy to see what a farmer does, but the job of data processing is hard to explain or visualize - it needs to be experienced to be understood."

The Wingspread meeting was an occasion which stated the problem and offered a challenge to do something about it. A seed was planted and would need to be nourished.

The Wingspread Conference was a thoughtful starting point for a number of businessmen from the Midwest. For those who have hoped to involve their businesses in a parent-child relationship, the conference experience reaffirmed the importance of the thoughtful, imaginative and venturesome business executive as a social catalyst.